own interest in the novel is not so much the social degeneration of post-civil war Boston, which he nonetheless records truthfully, as the effect of this degeneration on the life and sensibility of a young and innocent girl. Basil Ransom is able to see through the social corruption and realise the danger which Verena is facing. A "young man of first-rate intelligence/' Basil Ransom perceives the diabolic intention of Olive to wean Verena away from her true nature for her own ends. "He stood appalled for a moment, as he said to himself, that she would take her up and the girl would be ruined."[3]

Basil deplores the 'feminization' of his age. Doting, desexed men dance attendance on perverse, oversexed women; Selah Tarrant is 'a kind of shaman doing sexual service... to deprived Boston ladies'; Mathias Pardon is 'the castrate priest of the huge idol of publicity';* and Burrage is ruled tyrannically by his mother. Basil is sorry that 'the whole generation is womanised', that it is an age 'of false deli-cacy and coddled sensibilities.' Basil is determined to preserve 'the masculine character' and his final victory over Olive Chancellor is a victory of the natural over the perverse and the unnatural. It is characteristic Jamesian irony that a Southerner rescues Verena from Olive Chancellor,, to whom she has been literally sold by Verena's parents.

Basil believes that home is the proper sphere of women, and James seems to agree with him. The duty of women is to make themselves agreeable to men, which is "a truth as old as the human race."[10] For the affectionate and charming Verena the home of Basil is the proper sphere. Happiness lies in one being true to one's self, irrespective of what might happen In the process. Significantly enough, James ends the novel with the remark that marriage will not staunch the tears of Verena. Marriage is not a bed of roses, but that is no reason why a charming young woman should be afraid of it, when it is such a natural bond between men and women.

Refinement, then, for Verena lies in her realization that she should be true to her nature, for to be anything else is to be less than 'kind', and hence a step away from the refinement of nature. And her triumph over the fear of experience constitutes an initiation of the self into the world of reality which is not denatured by the removal of pain and suffering, but is placed in the possibility of redemption through conscious self-